

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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C O N F I D E N T I A L 8143

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SCUL, UR
SUBJECT: "MASTER AND MARGARITA" REVISITED

REF: MOSCOW 7828 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE APPEARANCE OF A CRITICAL REVIEW IN
PRAVDA OF LYUBIMOV'S PRODUCTION OF "MASTER AND MARGARITA"
APPARENTLY DOES NOT INDICATE THE PLAY'S EARLY DEMISE.
NEITHER DIRECTOR LYUBIMOV NOR OTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES
SHOW CONCERN. THEY CONSIDER THE CRITICISM RELATIVELY
MILD. WHAT MAY ULTIMATELY INSURE LONG LIFE FOR THE PLAY
IS THE FACT THAT IT SHOWS PROMISE OF BECOMING A FOREIGN
EXCHANGE EARNER AND CAN ENHANCE SOVIET CULTURAL PRESTIGE
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ABROAD. IT IS BEING TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, AND SOVIET CULTURAL
AUTHORITIES APPEAR WILLING TO PERMIT ITS PRODUCTION ABROAD.
END SUMMARY.

2. IT SEEMS THAT THE APPEARANCE OF THE CRITICAL, BUT NOT SCATHING,
PRAVDA REVIEW OF YURI LYUBIMOV'S CONTROVERSIAL PRODUCTION OF
"MASTER AND MARGARITA" AT THE TAGANKA THEATER DOES NOT INDICATE

THE PLAY'S EARLY DEMISE. LYUBIMOV HIMSELF IS TAKING A RELAXED VIEW OF THE ARTICLE AND EXPECTS THE PLAY TO REMAIN ON THE TAGANKA REPERTOIRE NEXT SEASON. OTHERS ALSO AGREE THAT THE REVIEW WOULD HAVE TO HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE SEVERE TO PUT THE PLAY IN JEOPARDY. LYUBIMOV'S RECENT REMARKS TO CULTURAL COUNSELOR MADE CLEAR THAT THE PLAY HAD BEEN CAREFULLY SCRUTINIZED AND APPROVED BY THE PARTY WATCHDOGS PRIOR TO OPENING. HE MENTIONED, FOR INSTANCE, THAT WHILE THE PLAY WAS IN REHEARSAL, IT WAS VIEWED BY MEMBERS OF A "PARTY COMMISSION ON THE WORKS OF BULGAKOV."

3. N. POTAPOV, THE AUTHOR OF THE PRAVDA REVIEW, HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE CHIEF OF THE CULTURE SECTION OF PRAVDA. ACCORDING TO ONE STORY WE HEARD, POTAPOV APPROACHED A NUMBER OF WRITERS IN AN EFFORT TO PERSUADE ONE TO DO A CRITICAL REVIEW. ALL OF THEM PROVED TO BE ADMIRERS OF LYUBIMOV AND BEGGED OFF. FINALLY, POTAPOV DECIDED TO WRITE THE REVIEW HIMSELF. HOWEVER, HE REPORTEDLY INCORPORATED A NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS MADE BY OTHERS. LYUBIMOV HAS REFERRED TO POTAPOV AS A PARTY TYPE AND CONCERNED PRIMARILY WITH PARTY AND IDEOLOGICAL MATTERS -- ALBEIT AN ERUDITE AND CULTIVATED ONE, JUDGING BY THE QUALITY OF THE REVIEW.

4. CULTURAL COUNSELOR WAS SHOWN A PROOF OF A REVIEW OF "MASTER AND MARGARITA" PREPARED FOR THE JUNE 1 ISSUE OF LITGAZ BUT WITHDRAWN AT THE LAST MINUTE. ITS AUTHOR, K. RUDNITSKIY, GAVE THE PLAY HIGH MARKS, PRAISED LYUBIMOV FOR COURAGE IN TACKLING A DEMANDING AND DIFFICULT PROJECT, AND VOICED ONLY MILD CRITICISM FOR THE "CRUDITY" OF SOME SCENES.

5. WHAT MAY ULTIMATELY INSURE LONG LIFE FOR THE PLAY IS NOT SO CONFIDENTIAL

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MUCH THE ACCLAIM OF THE SOVIET PUBLIC AS THE FACT THAT IT MAY BECOME THE EARNER OF VALUTA AND ENHANCE SOVIET PRESTIGE ABROAD. THE PLAY IS ALREADY BEING TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH AND IT IS CLEAR THAT VAAP, THE SOVIET COPYRIGHT AGENCY, (VSESOYUZHNOYE AGENTSTVO AVTORSKIKH PRAV) REGARDS IT AS A MARKETABLE COMMODITY IN THE US AND ELSEWHERE. FOREIGN INTEREST IN THE PLAY IS REPORTED TO BE EXTRAORDINARILY HIGH. THE POSSIBILITY OF ITS PRODUCTION IN THE US MAY BE DISCUSSED SHOULD PLANS MATURE FOR LYUBIMOV TO TRAVEL THERE NEXT YEAR AS GUEST DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER IN SAN FRANCISCO. HE STILL HOPES TO TAKE IT TO PARIS WHEN THE TAGANKA COMPANY GOES THERE NEXT YEAR, BUT THE CHANCES FOR THIS ARE REMOTE BECAUSE LYUBIMOV ALREADY PLANS TO TAKE SIX OTHER PLAYS THERE. A COMPANY ON TOUR RARELY TAKES MORE THAN THREE, MME. BUTROVA OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE COMMENTED TO EMBOFFS ON JUNE 7. THE OBSTACLE IN THIS INSTANCE IS THEREFORE ONE OF LOGISTICS RATHER THAN IDEOLOGY, IT WAS SUGGESTED.

6. COMMENT: AT THIS STAGE THE SUCCESS OF "M & M" SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ENHANCED BY THE PRAVDA CRITICISM, MUCH AS AN AMERICAN BOOK OR MOVIE USED TO BE ASSURED FINANCIAL SUCCESS IF HAILED INTO A US

COURT ON OBSCENITY CHARGES. MEANWHILE, LYUBIMOV IS TAKING
HIS CURRENT NOTORIETY IN STRIDE AND COMPLAINING ONLY OF HIS
CONSTANT HARASSMENT BY TICKET SEEKERS. AS HIS REMARKS TO US INDICATE,

HIS CONFIDENCE IS THE RESULT OF GOOD CONNECTIONS AND
EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH THE PARTY AND CULTURAL BUREAUCRACIES.
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